

YOUTH ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM & BEYOND: **ENGLISH**

-MIDDLE SCHOOL/7-8TH GRADE-

Activities:

PEER-TO-PEER

- Invite junior high or high school peer leaders to meet with small groups to discuss how alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs can interfere with extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, clubs, dances, trips). Be sure the peer leaders discuss school, sports rules, and sanctions. Students discuss the presentation and write a reaction.
- **“Know-Need to Know”**- Students break small groups and each research a different drug. Encourage students to use information from credible sources like <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/mentalhealth/prevention/prmc.html> to write a report that discusses the truth about each drug, misconceptions, health and related consequences, etc. Students can present the info junior and high school student groups (e.g., Athletes: ATOD affects on an athlete, impact and consequences of famous athletes who used ATOD, how it can risk future goals, etc.)
- **“Myth v. Fact Tweet”** where students share ATOD misperceptions and post buzz questions or comments. Share statistics on the number of teenagers who do not use drugs. Talk about how the media often focuses on teenagers who use drugs, rather than the majority of teens who do not. *Optional:* Students pre-interview students and adults in the community to gather information on current perception and uses these as topics.
- **“Letterman’s Top 10”** Divide the class into small groups to discuss the risks and consequences of substance use, looking at short-term and immediate risks and consequences. Each group develops a list of reasons not to use drugs and then must reach consensus on the top ten reasons in rank order from most least serious to most in reverse chronological order. A spokesperson for each group summarizes the discussion and presents the top reasons to the class. (Have a scribe record the top reasons from each group on a large sheet of newsprint). The entire class ranks the reasons and comes to consensus on the top ten and posts using youth technology or creates a YouTube video.
Optional: Students predict if these reasons will change as they get older.

KNOW YOUR NO

This activity allows students to explore the many reasons why people do not use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Prior to class, create index cards, each listing a reason not to use ATODs. Distribute the cards, one per student. In small groups, each student reads his/her card aloud, states the reason not to use, and tells which drug fits the reason. For example, Card=Drugs can damage body organs and systems. “I run track and need to have healthy lungs to do this ... if I smoke cigarettes because smoking causes lung damage making it hard to breathe” This reason fits Tobacco, marijuana and inhalants too.” As each group discusses the answers, the group’s recorder enters the information on chart paper divided into four quadrants, with headings as shown below.

- Some Reasons Not To Use Alcohol
- Some Reasons Not To Use Tobacco
- Some Reasons Not To Use Marijuana
- Some Reasons Not To Use Inhalants

Each group presents the reasons listed on the group chart. Using a sheet of paper divided into two columns, each student outlines “My Reasons for Not Using Drugs” and “Why Each Reason is Important to Me.” Volunteers share their responses.

NOW LIVE YOUR NO!

Sooner or later most teens are faced with making an important decision about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. In order to be prepared to make the right decision, students need to practice how to handle a variety of real-life situations. Use a video or laser disc about teens making tough choices to focus attention on the situations the characters faced, factors considered in making a choice, and how the choice was made. Checkout DVDs and other media at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/mentalhealth/prevention/prmc.html>

Divide the class into small groups to write their own screenplay called “The Party.” The script must emphasize the effective use of refusal and resistance skills. Allow time for students to develop the script, practice, and then present their original screenplay to the class. After each skit, allow time for discussion about the use of skills. The class votes on the best script/performance. Videotape the winning group performing its screenplay.

- **Variation:** Students use the video as a peer teaching tool or develop a parent/community education program on teenage substance use.
- **Variation:** Broadcast the video on school, university, or community channel
- **Variation:** Each student writes a letter to an anonymous teenager, offering the teen advice on how to deal with pressures to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

BUZZ INTO ACTION!

Organize several small “buzz” groups and assign each group an ATOD issue, such as how to rid of drugs in the community or how to stop the sale of tobacco products to kids. In each group, students discuss potential solutions and write the ideas on chart paper. Groups present their ideas to the class. Collect additional solutions and proposals from the class, and vote on the three best proposals. Using the ideas generated, students write letters to the editor or a government official expressing concern about one of the three issues and suggest possible strategies to deal with the issue.

- **Variation:** Have students explore expressing using different writing styles (i.e., persuasive). Students practice using these different styles and identifying best fits according to the purpose of the letter.

HELP A FRIEND:

Objective: Students think and share ways they could support and help a friend in need

Direction: Pose these questions and discuss: “A friend comes to you for advice. How prepared do you feel to give your friend advice? What is the first thing you would say or do when your friend approaches you with a problem? Where did you learn how to handle these kinds of situations? Are there times when you might be afraid or concerned to offer advice? When would that be?” After this initial discussion, organize the class into pairs and assign each pair a situation. Students alternate playing both listener and responder. After allowing time for practice and reflection, volunteers demonstrate effective listening and communication skills while helping a friend. After each situation, ask if there are alternative ways to handle the situation.

Sample Situations:

- A friend discloses he/she has started smoking.
- A friend discloses he/she is hanging out with older kids who drink.
- A friend discloses that he/she has begun taking pills to stay awake in class.
- A friend discloses that he/she is being pressured by an older teen to drink and have sex.
- Someone discloses that he/she tried smoking marijuana.
- Someone discloses that he/she has started drinking beer every day after school.
- A friend discloses that he/she is very depressed.
- A friend discloses that he/she is being bullied
- Someone discloses that his/her parents are getting a divorce.
- Someone discloses that his/her parent was arrested.
- Someone discloses that his/her brother is in the hospital after a drunk driving accident.

Keys to prevention at this age (7-8th grade):

When attempting to intervene positively in the lives of middle school youth, help them gain control of situations and not be controlled by them, it is important to remember what motivates them.

- They are often controlled by the moment, acting first and thinking about it later. What feels good at the moment can easily dictate the choices they will make.
- They are keenly interested in their bodies and appearance, in how to become stronger or more attractive. This interest can provide a natural opening to teach them about the health hazards of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.
- They are big risk takers, quick to test limits, break rules and even flirt with death. They enjoy danger and often believe they are invincible.
- They can think abstractly and are sufficiently aware of their own future to see the benefits of education and how their behavior can have long-term consequences.
- They are beginning to see shades of gray and recognize that complex moral issues cannot always be defined in black and white. They are influenced more by their own ability to make moral judgments than by the opinions of those who have the power and authority to tell them what to believe and how to behave.
- They are involved in their friendships. It is through friendships that they explore the world, test out ways of being and behaving, and acquire a sense of both belonging and identity. It is critical that parents, teachers and other adults help them learn how to develop healthy, positive friendships and reject friendships that are unhealthy.
- They want to grow up, but they don't always know how to do it successfully. They definitely need adults in their lives to answer their questions, help with their problems, and generally serve as models of healthy, responsible, mature behavior.

Evidence Based Prevention Strategies: *Correcting Misperceptions of Norms, Increasing Perception of Personal Risk, Life Skills Training, and Connecting to Community Prevention Efforts.*

- Correct the students' misperceptions of norms (exaggerations of use of alcohol tobacco and other drugs). For example, the assumption that "everyone is doing it"
- Build social skills stressing individuation/resisting peer pressure.
- Raise awareness of the dangers of substance abuse and the benefits of positive behavior.
- Emphasize norms that promote healthy lifestyles.
- Make students aware of the influence of advertising on people's use of these substances.

SOURCES: Real Life Issues Curriculum Infusion, *Network for Dissemination of Curriculum Infusion at Northern Illinois University*; American Council for Drug Education (ACDE)

